



For release:
February 4, 2015

Contact:
Kristin Dizon
Communications Manager
206.270.4908
kdizon@casey.org

Exceptional Individuals Honored for Improving Life Outcomes for Vulnerable Children and Families

Casey Excellence for Children Awards recognize individuals making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families across America

SEATTLE – Casey Family Programs, the nation’s largest operating foundation focused solely on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for vulnerable children and families across America, is pleased to announce the winners of the annual Casey Excellence for Children Awards.

These awards recognize outstanding individuals and leaders in child welfare who have demonstrated distinguished work, exceptional leadership and relentless dedication in improving child welfare systems in America. Award winners are selected from among a group of outstanding nominees in five categories: birth parents, alumni of foster care, foster parents, kinship caregivers, and child welfare leaders.

“The incredible dedication and commitment of these individuals is helping build safe, healthy communities of hope across the country where children and their families can thrive,” said Bob Watt, chair of the Board of Trustees of Casey Family Programs. “We are pleased to recognize the work of these leaders and celebrate their contributions to vulnerable children and families.”

The winners of the Casey Excellence for Children Awards are:

Birth Parent Awards - Father

Timothy Phipps
Portland, Oregon

Mr. Phipps is a single father and advocate from Portland, Oregon, who successfully turned around his alcohol/drug addiction and domestic violence issues to provide a safe and healthy environment for his 12 year-old daughter. After his experience in a parent support group and numerous classes in parenting, anger management and healthy relationships, Mr. Phipps became a parent mentor with Morrison Child and Family Services. He facilitates a support group to help fathers regain custody of their children, if

possible, or rebuild healthy, consistent relationships with them. A founding member of the Fathers Advisory Board in Multnomah County, he is also on a subcommittee working to develop a statewide parent leadership team for Oregon's child welfare system.

Birth Parent Awards - Mother

Sandra Killett

New York, New York

Ms. Killett, executive director of the Child Welfare Organizing Project, is a tireless champion for New York City families in the child welfare system. A single mother of two boys, her older son was placed in foster care nearly a decade ago due to aggressive behavior problems. Through her strong advocacy, her son was able to successfully reunite with the family and the two have a close relationship. Ms. Killett has educated parents about their rights and reunification processes, and worked to reform child welfare policies through years of advocacy. In addition to her service on numerous boards and committees, Ms. Killett is an engaging public speaker who promotes the value of parent voices in shaping programs and policies that improve outcomes for families.

Alumni Award

Lamar Graham

Columbus, Ohio

An alumnus of foster care, Mr. Graham is director of the Heart to Heart Food Pantry for First Community Church. There, he has greatly increased volunteers at the food pantry as well as local business donations. In addition, he has created a welcoming atmosphere – with music, recipes and cooking demonstrations. Mr. Graham has also worked on initiatives to support foster youth in higher education and is a highly regarded and inspiring foster alumni trainer for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program. In his spare time, Mr. Graham works at a recreation center, organizing basketball and volleyball and movie nights for local youth. He also teaches Sunday school and mentors other youth, including his foster brothers.

Foster Parent Award

Jerry and Sally Ellis

Nampa, Idaho

Jerry and Sally Ellis have been foster parents for 21 years, helping to raise 20 children in addition to their own children. The Ellis' heartfelt and enduring commitment has led to many successful outcomes for youth in their home and they work hard to facilitate contact between youth, birth family and siblings. For the past two years, the Ellis family has made their home available for weekly sibling visits between five siblings who were not able to be placed together. They have also provided short term and respite care to countless youth over the past two decades. Additionally, Mr. and Mrs. Ellis offer guidance to a wide range of foster parents, contribute to a statewide Foster Parent Conference and participate in training and educational opportunities.

Kinship Caregiver Award

Bobby and Theresa Coleman

Phoenix, Arizona

The Coleman family opened their home to Bobby's 15-year-old, second cousin in 2013, adding to their three own children, including one with special needs. The Colemans welcomed and encouraged a relationship and communication with their foster son's family. After his biological parents decided the Colemans would better meet his needs, Mr. and Mrs. Coleman became the boy's guardians. They further welcomed his younger brother into their home as a family member. Viewed as role models by other foster parents, the Colemans are excellent advocates and always seek additional opportunities for growth and life lessons for the youth in their care.

Child Welfare Leader Awards

Theodore Dallas

*Secretary, Maryland Department of Human Services
Baltimore, Maryland*

Secretary Dallas has consistently championed new ideas and innovations in Maryland that have contributed to dramatically and safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home care. Over six years ago, Maryland created its Place Matters Initiative with the goal of safely reducing the need for foster care and to provide more services to children in their own homes. This ambitious effort included a reorientation of the state's child welfare practice and policies, and a strong focus on family engagement and reaching families when their challenges are not significant enough to require out-of-home placement of their children. Secretary Dallas collaborated with lawmakers to pass what would become the state's first legislation to provide supports and services to low-risk families in their own homes and communities. Across Maryland, almost every county's numbers of children in out-of-home care are far below where they were five years ago.

Joette Katz

*Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Children and Families
Hartford, Connecticut*

Commissioner Katz is a strong leader who has consistently delivered results by improving the safety, permanency and well-being of vulnerable children. She has supported efforts to connect at-risk families with services to prevent maltreatment and safely reduce the need for foster care. During her four-year tenure, Commissioner Katz has implemented a deeper focus on finding permanent homes for children in care and broadened the focus on wellbeing to include educational achievement, increased visitation with siblings and life skills for adolescents. Under her leadership, the department has shown a strong increase in the number of children placed with relative caregivers, a substantial decrease in the number of children placed in out of state care and in congregate, or group care. She has worked to implement a family-focused practice model in which families are listened to, treated with respect and seen as the solution rather than the problem.

Brenda Donald

*Deputy Mayor for District of Columbia Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C.*

Recently appointed as Deputy Mayor, previously Ms. Donald directed the Child and Family Services Agency with strong leadership and vision, and a track record of accelerated reform, performance improvement, and achievement. During her tenure as director, the agency consistently delivered positive outcomes for the District's children, youth, and families, including safely reducing the number

of children in foster care, providing alternative services for families who need support, and placing a higher number of children who need homes with relatives. Ms. Donald conceived and implemented the “Four Pillars” model for D.C.’s child welfare system, to engage private partners and advocates to help protect and support children and families. She has worked to rapidly transform child welfare practice in the District, infusing it with the best practices and innovations that support positive outcomes. Held in high esteem by her colleagues, Ms. Donald is a role model for her national peers.

Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe

Port Gamble, Washington

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe has been a prominent leader in the move toward tribal access of direct federal funding of child welfare in the U.S. Port Gamble achieved this milestone in far less time than the usual two-year planning process. The Tribe successfully operates tribal child support, tribal assistance for needy families, tribal Head Start and a nurse home visiting program. Port Gamble also recently became the first tribe to obtain approval of their application for a federal IV-E funds waiver, which will give them more financial flexibility to provide culturally appropriate services that preserve and strengthen youth and families.

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Pablo, Montana

The three-person leadership team for child welfare of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes brings a deep understanding and collaboration to their advocacy for tribal sovereignty and self-determination, enhancing opportunities for Indian children in Montana to know who they are and have a lifelong connection to their tribes, family, history and language. The team has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to complying with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, and to strengthening practice, and improving outcomes for vulnerable tribal children and families. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes - the first tribes to implement their own foster care program under a federal waiver program - have been at the forefront of the nation building movement among federally-recognized tribes in the United States. They oversee 19 separately funded programs on the reservation and administer and manage their own child welfare programs.

Judge Katherine G. Essrig

Thirteenth Circuit Court, Hillsborough County, Florida

Tampa, Florida

Judge Essrig serves as Administrative Judge of the Unified Family Court/Juvenile Dependency in Hillsborough County, Florida and demonstrates her commitment to children and families through her caring and engaging courtroom manner. She chairs a local cross-system project, the Safe Reduction Workgroup, a data-driven effort to transform the Hillsborough County child protection system from reactive and siloed to proactive and united. As the statewide level, Judge Essrig chairs the Dependency Court Improvement Panel and is a member of the Florida Supreme Court Steering Committee on Children and Families in the Courts. Nationally, Judge Essrig speaks to national groups regularly and is a proponent of federal child welfare finance reform.

Judge Jay Dugger

*Chief Judge, Hampton Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court
Hampton, Virginia*

Judge Dugger has been a leader in juvenile justice and foster care issues for over a decade. As the lead judge for Hampton's Best Practice Initiative, he has worked to improve the legal system's approach to dealing with abused and neglected children. Judge Dugger was a collaborative leader in the creation of Hampton's Family Stabilization Program, which offers services to help support families whose children are at risk of removal for behavioral or delinquency issues. He was also instrumental in developing Hampton's Child Dependency Mediation Program, the Safe Harbor for Kids Visitation Center and mental health screening and truancy initiatives. Judge Dugger has led and supported numerous other collaborative programs related to abused and neglected children, juvenile justice and child support.

#

Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused solely on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for vulnerable children and families across America. Founded in 1966, we work to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and well-being of children, families and the communities where they live. For more information visit: www.casey.org.